CrossGen
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NOV
MYSTIC
DEADSHOT
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Giselle

never wanted ultimate power, but fate had other plans for her.

Born on a world ruled by seven magical Guilds, Giselle Villard disdained the mystic arts while her elder sister, Genevieve, rose through the ranks of the powerful Nouveau Guild. During the ceremony where Genevieve was to inherit her Guild's Eternal Spirit, a mysterious stranger branded a mark of power onto Giselle's right palm. This red and yellow Sigil forced the Eternal Spirits out of all seven Guild Masters and bound them to Giselle. Granted vast magical might, Giselle reluctantly became the most powerful Mystic ever known.

Recently, Giselle faced a new threat – the magic-stealing Geometer Guild. The Master of that secret society fell in battle, and Giselle reached an uneasy truce with the Dark Magi Master, who was in league with the Geometers. Now Giselle hunts for the other turncoat Master: Vashua of the Tantric Guild. Aiding Giselle in the hunt are her faithful familiar, Skitter, and the fallen demigod Darrow, who seems to have turned from his formerly evil ways...

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WHERE ARE YOU *FROM?*
WHY ARE YOU WEARING *THESE?*
ARE YOU AND *SHE* TOGETHER?
WOULD YOU *BOTH* LIKE SOME COMPANY...?
NO, WE ARE *NOT*... "TOGETHER."

I'M HERE ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS, AND I DON'T TRUST *HIM* ENOUGH TO LEAVE HIM *ALONE*.

DARROW, THIS IS AWKWARD *ENOUGH* WITHOUT YOU CARRYING ON WITH THESE GIRLS--!

BUT...BUT *THEY* APPROACHED *ME*...!

THEN POLITELY TELL THEM TO *GET LOST!* I HALF EXPECT THESE PEOPLE TO BLAME ME FOR THEIR GUILD MASTER'S CRIMES. I DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT *YOU* ON TOP OF THAT--!

I *SWORE* TO YOU THAT I AM A CHANGED MAN, AND SO YOU SHALL SEE THAT I *AM*.

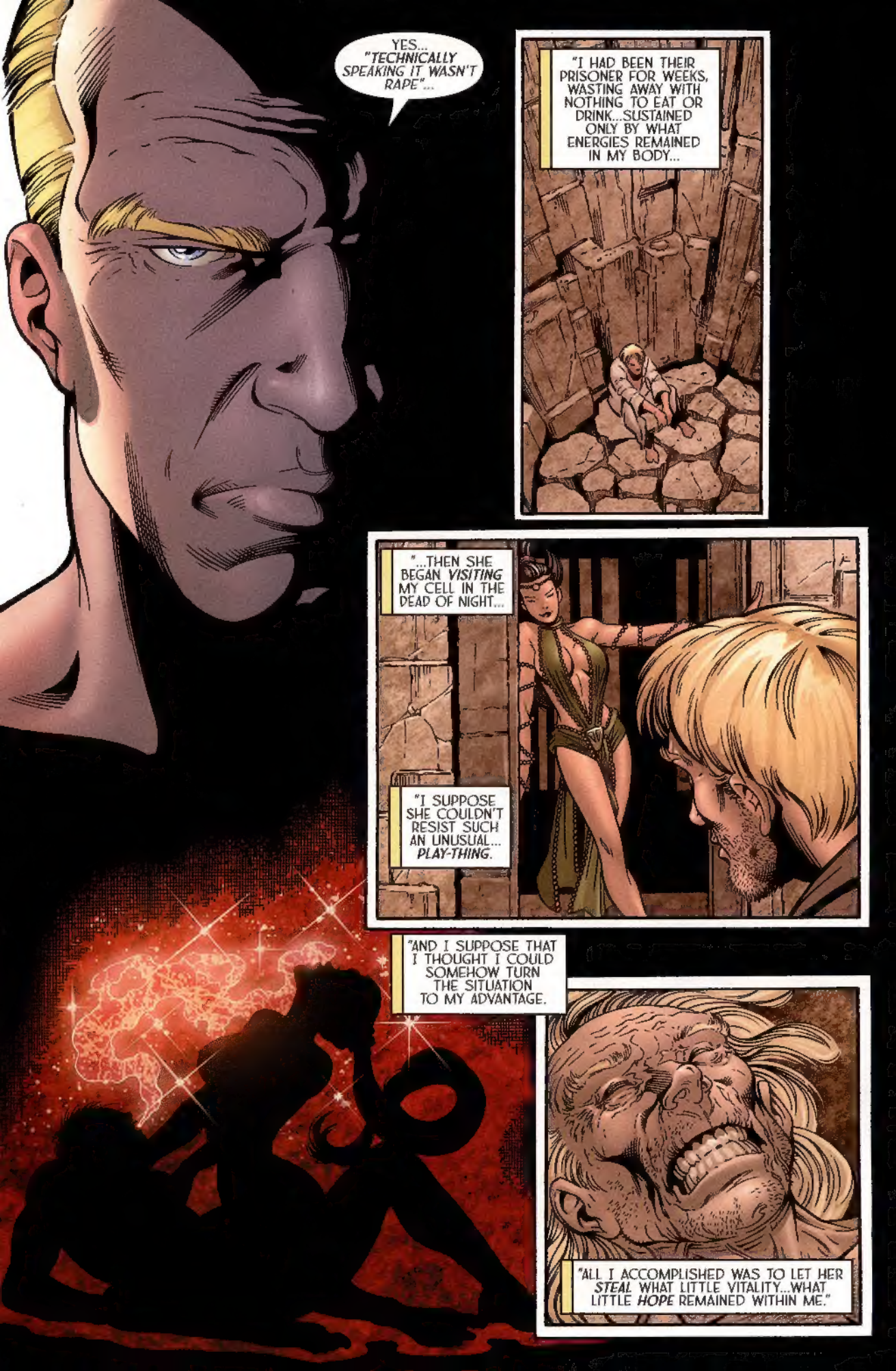
GISELLE VILLARD! YOU KNOW YOU ARE *UNWELCOME* HERE. WHAT COULD *POSSIBLY* COMPEL YOU TO RETURN TO THE TANTRIC LANDS?

LONG STORY, um...
THUSIUS.
RIGHT. SO, THUSIUS, DO YOU THINK WE COULD *TALK* FOR A MINUTE? Y'KNOW IN *PRIVATE?*
FIRST, YOUR COMPANION WILL CHANGE OUT OF THESE *RAGS*. THIS IS OUR *CATHEDRAL* AFTER ALL...
I...
I MEANT NO OFFENSE.
SECOND, THERE IS *NOTHING* YOU CAN TELL ME THAT CANNOT BE SAID IN FRONT OF THE GUARDS.
FINE.
YOU ALREADY KNOW A *SECRET GUILD* CAPTURED THE MASTERS OF THE MAJOR MAGICAL GUILDS AND TRIED TO TAKE OVER CIRESS.
WHAT YOU *DON'T* KNOW IS THAT YOUR GUILD MASTER, VASHUA, WASN'T THEIR VICTIM, SHE WAS THEIR *ALLY.*
I STOPPED THEIR PLOT, AND NOW VASHUA IS ON THE *LOOSE*-- SOMEWHERE IN *YOUR* TERRITORY, I SUSPECT.
JUST THOUGHT YOU'D RATHER *HELP* ME, THAN HAVE ME TURN THIS LAND *UPSIDE DOWN* TRYING TO FIND HER.
...OF COURSE...

...AND SHE ALLIED US WITH THE *DARK MAGI*...? HOW COULD I HAVE *MISSED* THIS? I WAS *WITH* HER EVERY DAY...!
MASTER ARCHEMUS AND HIS GEOMETER GUILD WERE *ALL ABOUT* KEEPING THEIR ACTIONS HIDDEN.
THEY SAID THEY'D BEEN GUIDING MOST BIG EVENTS IN HISTORY FOR THE PAST FIVE HUNDRED YEARS...
...NOW *THEY'RE* HISTORY, AND VASHUA HAS TO ANSWER FOR WHAT SHE DID.
CAN YOU THINK OF ANYWHERE SHE MIGHT *HIDE?* OR ANY TECHNIQUES OF YOUR GUILD'S MAGIC THAT WOULD AID HER?
Mmm...VASHUA GREW UP NEAR A VOLCANO THAT IS SACRED TO OUR PEOPLE--MONS CHAKRA. THAT IS WHERE I WOULD BEGIN THE SEARCH.
BUT I *WARN* YOU THAT SHE WILL NOT BE TAKEN *ALIVE*. IT WOULD NOT SURPRISE ME IF SHE INVOKED AN ERUPTION JUST TO TAKE YOU WITH HER.
WHICH BRINGS ME TO A DELICATE MATTER: WITH VASHUA IN DISGRACE, THE GUILD COUNCIL WISHES TO APPOINT *ME* AS OUR NEW GUILD MASTER.
HOWEVER, WE CANNOT APPOINT A NEW MASTER UNTIL THE OLD MASTER IS *DEAD*.
SO IF SHE FORCES YOU TO *KILL* HER, COMFORT YOURSELF WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WE WILL NOT MOURN A *TRAITOR*.

LET'S GO, DARROW. WE HAVE A LOT OF GROUND TO COVER.
I REALLY MUST COMPLIMENT THESE PEOPLE ON THE DECOR. THESE STATUES ARE QUITE EXQUISITE IN THEIR OWN WAY.
TRUE, THEY LACK THE UTTER PERFECTION OF ANY OBJET D'ART BACK HOME ON ELYSIA, BUT I NOW FIND THAT ITS VERY FLAWS ARE WHAT GIVE YOUR ART SUCH CHARACTER.
EVEN YOUR ARCHITECTURE IS CHARMING IN ITS ROUGH-HEWN ELEGANCE AND NAIVE ASPIRATIONS. WHY DID I NEVER SEE THIS BEFORE...?
SORRY TO SIDETRACK YOU FROM YOUR LITTLE EPIPHANY, BUT WE HAVE AN ENEMY TO CATCH.
QUITE RIGHT. MONS CHAKRA.
FWASH

AND ANOTHER THING, DARROW...
...THE *NEXT* TIME YOU WANNA SHARE YOUR GEE-WHIZ OBSERVATIONS ON WHY US MORTALS AREN'T SO BAD AFTER ALL... *DON'T.*
I MEANT NO--
WE WERE CLOSE ONCE, AND YOU *USED* ME. MAYBE *TECHNICALLY* SPEAKING IT WASN'T RAPE, BUT THAT'S WHAT IT FELT LIKE.
SO *DON'T* PUSH YOUR LUCK WITH ME, AND *STOP* TRYING TO CONVINCE ME YOU'VE TURNED A NEW LEAF.
UNDERSTOOD.
THE ONLY REASON YOU'RE HERE IS BECAUSE OF YOUR...*SPECIAL CONNECTION* WITH VASHUA...


YES... "TECHNICALLY SPEAKING IT WASN'T RAPE"...
"I HAD BEEN THEIR PRISONER FOR WEEKS, WASTING AWAY WITH NOTHING TO EAT OR DRINK...SUSTAINED ONLY BY WHAT ENERGIES REMAINED IN MY BODY...
"...THEN SHE BEGAN *VISITING* MY CELL IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT...
"I SUPPOSE SHE COULDN'T RESIST SUCH AN UNUSUAL... *PLAY-THING.*
"AND I SUPPOSE THAT I THOUGHT I COULD SOMEHOW TURN THE SITUATION TO MY ADVANTAGE.
"ALL I ACCOMPLISHED WAS TO LET HER *STEAL* WHAT LITTLE VITALITY...WHAT LITTLE *HOPE* REMAINED WITHIN ME."

I KNOW HER ESSENCE... INTIMATELY. IF SHE IS CLOSE, I WILL FEEL IT.
THEN LET'S GET ON WITH IT...
Yow!
WELL...?
NOTHING YET. SORRY.
How about askin' the Guild Spirits?
MAY AS WELL...
HELLO, TANTRIC SPIRIT?
HEROTUS, ARE YOU LISTENING IN...?
OF COURSE, GISELLE. WE ARE ALWAYS MONITORING YOUR ACTIONS.
WHETHER I LIKE IT OR NOT.
SO, ANY POINTERS ON HOW TO FIND VASHUA?

I HAVE BEEN PONDERING THAT VERY QUESTION. THERE ARE SEVERAL THINGS SHE MIGHT HAVE DONE IN ORDER TO HIDE
SHE MAY NOT EVEN LOOK LIKE HERSELF ANYMORE
IS IT TRUE WHAT THUSIUS SAID. THAT SHE WOULD MAKE THE VOLCANO BLOW TO AVOID BEING CAPTURED?
YES
OKAY. DO YOU GUYS HAVE A TEMPLE OR SOMETHING SOMEWHERE ACTUALLY ON THE MOUNTAIN?
THERE IS A SMALL MEDITATION SHRINE NEAR THE SUMMIT, BUT THE MAIN TEMPLE IS IN THE CITY AT THE FOOT OF MONS CHAKRA
I'M THINKING IF THE VOLCANO IS HER WEAPON OF LAST RESORT SHE'LL NEED TO BE RIGHT ON TOP OF IT
GISELLE! I AM SENSING HER PRESENCE

SHE IS NEARBY THOUGH I CANNOT SAY EXACTLY WHERE
GISELLE ABOUT THE USE OF *DEADLY FORCE* AGAINST HER.
YEAH, I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO IT, BUT I'M *READY* IF IT COMES TO THAT WE CAN'T TAKE ANY *CHANCES* WITH HER
ACTUALLY WHAT I WAS *GOING* TO SAY--
Ah, folks...?
SO MUCH FOR *SNEAKING UP* ON HER!
I'LL DRAW HER FIRE--YOU TRY TO *OUTFLANK* HER
AS YOU WISH

RRRUMMMBBBLE
BETTER HURRY!
GISELLE VILLARD! I KNOW YOU HAVE COME TO KILL ME!
LEAVE NOW, OR I WILL BURY US ALL IN BRIMSTONE!
PLEASE-- THINK OF THE INNOCENTS BELOW!
COME ON, DARROW LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH
PLEASE HEROTUS WHEREVER YOU ARE GRANT HER THE WISDOM TO

GOT HER!
THROW HER CLEAR!
NO, WAIT!
SHRAKT
AHHH!
DARROW! WHY?!

HE HE KNEW
-groan-
END OF THE LINE, YOU EVIL~
WAIT!
DON'T, GISELLE! THAT'S NOT VASHUA!
WELL NOT EXACTLY
huh?
THROOM
FSHHHHHHHH
THERE I'VE CALLED IT OFF WILL YOU HEAR ME OUT?
THIS BETTER BE GOOD

VASHUA SWITCHED BODIES WITH ME! SHE...
..SHE SAID YOU'D COME TO KILL ME--THAT YOU WOULD CAST FIRST AND ASK QUESTIONS LATER!
I..I HAD TO DEFEND MYSELF, BUT I WOULD NEVER HAVE REALLY LET THE VOLCANO BLOW..
BUT..IF THERE'S REALLY SOMEONE ELSE IN HER BODY, THEN...
WHEN DID YOU FIRST SENSE THIS BODY-SWAP THING?
BACK AT THE CATHEDRAL I KNEW RIGHT AWAY THAT VASHUA'S ESSENCE WAS HIDING IN THE BODY OF BROTHER THUSIUS
AND YOU DIDN'T THINK THIS WAS WORTH MENTIONING ?!
IF I HAD TIPPED OUR HAND THEN, WE MIGHT NEVER HAVE FOUND VASHUA'S BODY--
--IN ORDER TO REVERSE THE SPELL. I GET IT
BUT WHY EXCHANGE THIS BODY FOR AN OLD MAN'S CREAKY BONES?
Because this way she could fake her death and still cling to power...

" In fact, she's probably arranging her own Rite of Ascension right about now"
MAKE CERTAIN THE VIP SEATING IS CORDONED OFF
HAS ANYONE HEARD FROM THE CATERERS?
MASTER--!
SWASH
GUARDS!
YOU CAPTURED HER--?!
ALIVE?
GUARDS! TAKE HER TO THE DUNGEON IMMEDIATELY!

NOT SO FAST, VASHUA
GIVE ME BACK MY *BODY*, YOU BACKSTABBING *HAG!*
WHO DO WE--?
I DON'T *KNOW!*
DARROW, MY *PET*..
COME TO *TAKE BACK* YOUR POWER?
ah...

snff
SHRAK!
SHRAK!
GISELLE! YOU DO CARE!
DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY
ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER
SHUT UP!
Boomph-!
YAAHH!

NOOOO..!
Sunhε
Sgahε
THUSIUS ?
YES, IT'S *ME* MY THANKS TO *BOTH* OF YOU
WOULD YOU BE SO KIND AS TO ESCORT THIS *DISGRACE* TO OUR DUNGEON, MISTER ?
DARROW
THE GUARDS WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY, MISTER *DARROW* ONCE SHE IS INSIDE A CELL, THE GLYPHS AND WARDS SHOULD HOLD HER
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO YOU KNOW. ?
KILL HER? NO, I DON'T THINK SO
I COULDN'T GIVE THAT COMMAND IN COLD BLOOD, REGARDLESS OF WHAT SHE'S DONE

BUT HOW WILL YOU APPOINT A NEW GUILD MASTER?
I'VE BEEN THINKING THAT PERHAPS WE SHOULD NOT.
AND FORFEIT YOUR STATUS AS ONE OF THE SEVEN MAJOR GUILDS?
I THINK PERHAPS THAT WAS ALREADY LOST THE MOMENT VASHUA BROKE TRUST WITH THE WORLD COMMUNITY
I THINK WE HAVE SOME INTERNAL PROBLEMS TO OVERCOME BEFORE WE WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT TEMPORAL POWER
HEROTUS? YOU CATCHING ALL THIS?
YES, GISELLE AND I THINK BROTHER THUSIUS IS CORRECT AT THIS POINT, A HIATUS FROM THE WORLD STAGE WILL DO US GOOD
FOR MY PART, I CAN AFFORD TO WAIT AS LONG AS IT TAKES FOR THE TANTRIC GUILD TO REHABILITATE ITS REPUTATION
WHAT ABOUT YOU, DARROW?
TO BE HONEST, I'D LIKE TO STAY HERE AND LEARN FROM THESE PEOPLE.
STUDYING THE GUILDS SEEMED TO DO YOU A WORLD OF GOOD. PERHAPS I, TOO, WILL FIND SOME OF THE WISDOM YOU GAINED

Kind of a gamble, leaving Darrow to his own devices, ain't it?
I THINK HE EARNED A CHANCE TO PROVE HIMSELF WHEN HE TOOK THAT BOLT MEANT FOR VASHUA
OR SHOULD I SAY IT WAS MEANT FOR THUSIUS
IN VASHUA'S BODY, THAT IS
WHY IS IT THAT THIS PLACE CONFUSES ME EVEN WORSE THAN THE ASTRAL LANDS?
All that body stuff -- sex, love, whatever -- it's supposed to be confusing
Most people spend a lifetime trying to sort it out, and they never do
For what it's worth, I think you did the right thing Darrow really did seem changed
REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE RAN INTO SOMEONE ON THIS ROAD?
Yep. The succubus. Not exactly our finest hour
AT LEAST THIS TIME, WE'RE LEAVING WITH OUR HEADS HELD HIGH
HELLO, THERE
!

GREETINGS, GISELLE VILLARD.
I BELIEVE YOU *HAVE* SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO *ME*...
We've got trouble, kid! Big trouble!

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A different take on
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#41
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